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Russian Cultural Anthropology after the Collapse of Communism, Albert Baiburin, Catriona Kelly and Nikolai Vakhtin, eds. (Review)

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Russian Cultural Anthropology after the Collapse of Communism, **Albert Baiburin, Catriona Kelly and Nikolai Vakhtin, eds. (Review)**

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Albert Baiburin, Catriona Kelly and Nikolai Vakhtin, eds. *Russian Cultural Anthropology after the Collapse of Communism*. Routledge Contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe Series, vol. 34. London: Routledge. 2012. Index. x + 283 pp. \$155.00 (cloth).

Russian Cultural Anthropology after the Collapse of Communism is a welcome addition to the scholarship on Soviet-era and post-Soviet anthropology, ethnography, and folkloristics. The book consists of an introduction and 11 articles that demonstrate trends in post-socialist anthropology in Russia. The materials range widely from studies of minority peoples to Soviet reality and post-socialist memory. In their introduction to the volume, Baiburin, Kelly and Vakhtin provide a fine overview of the challenges Soviet-era anthropologists faced, in particular the political pressure to conform to changing state ideals about ethnicity (*etnos*). They outline how the work of specialists was required "to celebrate convergence and to trace the development of a harmonious and homogeneous Soviet culture" (2). They track theoretical developments and practices into the post-Soviet period, particularly which Western scholars influenced the discipline. The articles they have chosen are intended to rectify the gap in available English-language materials.

The first article in the volume, "Writing the History of Russian Anthropology," presents a gloomy view of the state of the discipline in Russia. Sokolovsky's detailed consideration lays out the problems, some of which are shared by anthropology as a discipline widely, some of which result from the Soviet inheritance, and some of which are due to post-socialist conditions. He discusses the legacy of the Soviet era, current political pressures (research dealing with the ruling elite or negative aspects of daily life is poorly funded), the lack of scholarly resources, watered-down scholarly discourse, and "an absence of goal-directed, systematic and conscientious work on the image of the discipline" (29).

Thereafter, articles in the volume may roughly be divided into thematic areas (although the editors do not do so explicitly). Three articles focus on aspects of Soviet reality, two on reformulating the conclusions of prior research, three on religious practices and two on memory. In his article "'The Wrong Nationality': Ascribed Identity in the 1930s," Baiburin addresses the "binary character" (59) of Soviet law with its public and private faces. He studies how private aspects of practices about nationality in the 1930s led citizens to attempt to change nationalities on their passports that were often assigned against their will (even though during this period people were legally allowed to choose their nationality). Despite official policy that all nationalities were equal, people were responding to fears of being persecuted as members of an "external" nationality. The article provides a fine introduction to the complexity of nationality within the Soviet context over time. Bogdanov's rich and entertaining piece, "The Queue as Narrative," deals with yet another example of the unspoken rules of daily Soviet life as reflected in the ubiquitous line. He studies how queues reflected a sense of justice, equality (and, seemingly paradoxically, hierarchy), and faith in the system. His analysis relies on a wide range of data, from personal memory to statistics and literature. Of particular interest is his consideration of how the line "functioned not only as a repressive, but also as a constructive (therapeutic) mechanism of social interactivity" (92). Kelly and Sirotinina outline a similar contradiction in their study of late Soviet public festivals. The authors focus on how the practices were largely divorced from the ideology they were designed to convey. Rather, children of this generation ascribed meaning to them on the basis of the seasons and their role in the individual's family.

The articles by Manuylov and Liarskaya focus on limitations of past research in two areas, namely the notion of privacy in Russian culture and female taboos in Nenets culture. Liarskaya points out the flaws in prior research about women as unclean and subject to more taboos than men or children. She exposes erroneous arguments in previous works and criticizes conclusions made on the basis of incomplete or inaccurate data. In his study of village privacy, Manuylov takes "issue with the rigid division into public and private 'sphere' propounded in post-Habermasian social theory" (130). He uses a structuralist syntagmatic and paradigmatic approach to the question and shows how these concepts fit into a "poststructuralist paradigm"

(145). While both articles have merit, they were the least successful in this valuable collection. In the case of Liarskaya, I wished she had cited more specific data, which would be useful for scholars interested in the question of taboo. Manuylov's work has some valuable insights into the way public/quasi-public/private functions in this village community, but the analytical framework tends to overshadow his conclusions, rather than illuminate them.

Kormina and Shtyrkov's "Believers' Letters as Advertising: St. Xenia of Petersburg's 'National Reception Center'" is a fine addition to recent work on the revival of the Russian Orthodox Church in the post-socialist context. This nuanced study of letters to St. Xenia demonstrates that the Church is continuing the tradition (established in the early years of the twentieth century) of her role as a people's saint. They conclude that the Church desires to show that it is a populist institution and is using the letters as a marketing tool to build its brand, e.g., as a business would. In their articles, Akhmetova and Boitsova examine how contemporary reality has affected belief and practices among particular groups, namely in a conservative Orthodox group in Nizhegorodskaya oblast' and among urban families. Akhmetova investigates how the Chinese have assumed a prominent role within this group's eschatology. She makes a compelling argument about how the content of their writings and legends reinforces Russian nationalism and evinces a desire to cleanse Russia of its weak and sinful elements, so that it can be reborn in time for the Apocalypse. Boitsova, on the other hand, deals with a much more widespread phenomenon: the practice of post-mortem photography. The author also situates her study within religious and cultural traditions of the past and demonstrates how they have changed in the post-socialist reality. For example, now that funerary practices have been removed from the family apartment to a funeral home, these pictures are no longer common. The existing pictures have always caused ambivalent reactions among the urban population, but they cannot be destroyed, because they are a testament to "the collective and the eternal" (204) nature of a funeral rite.

The final two articles in the collection deal with memory of the Soviet era. Kupriyanov and Sadovnikova study the former residential area of Zaryadye, a historic district in Moscow, while Abrahamian (the only non-Russian author) considers memory and memorials in the context of post-Soviet Yerevan, Armenia. The study of memory, particularly of traumatic events, is a growing field, and these articles provide intriguing insights into these questions in the post-socialist context, a rich source of the problematic nature of memory and memorialization. The analysis of the oral narratives of the former residents of Zaryadye (who were forcibly relocated to other areas of Moscow) is a nuanced portrait of how memory is constructed, how place is conceived of and how identity is related to these issues. Abrahamian presents a solid consideration of place, construction, and memory and their connection to contemporary and past political ideologies and to religious and folk traditions in the Armenian capital.

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Irina Papkova. *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*. Oxford, UK: Oxford UP, 2011. Appendix. Index. xiii + 265 pp. Cloth.

The notorious and culturally powerful case of Pussy Riot makes it clear that religion and politics are inextricably intertwined in Russia today. It is not surprising, then, that the last decade has seen the publication of a large number of books on the changing role of the Russian Orthodox Church in post-Soviet Russia published both in Russia and abroad.

Irina Papkova's book, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, is one of these. Papkova aims to address misconceptions and examine the character of church-state relations in contemporary Russia. It is worth mentioning that Papkova was born into a clerical family and cares